

Croquet players have a chance to exercise and compete

By Elizabeth Crumbly, for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Lee Robinson will concede that the all-white outfits he and his fellow U.S. Croquet Association players wear can seem a little silly.

“Everybody’s got to wear white. That’s sort of a tradition,” he told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. “We all look like a milkman convention out there.”

Other than the outfits though, there’s nothing Robinson — who plays at Sky Valley Country Club in Sky Valley — doesn’t like about the game of wickets and mallets and colorful balls. To start, the regular matches help Robinson, 74, keep moving.

“I normally will rack up 3,000 to 4,000 steps, at least,” he said. “If I’m playing with good players, I might be walking a little bit more than that, so for somebody in their 60s or 70s looking for light-impact fitness, I think croquet is just really one of the best things you can do.”

An even playing field

And the croquet lawn is an even playing field for players of both genders.

“The good thing about croquet is that women and men can play at the same level,” Robinson said. “Consequently, you don’t get into the problem that you get into with a lot of sports where men have to play with men or women with women, or they don’t enjoy it the same.”

Robinson contends that the game, whether casual or competitive, is great for seniors, with its relatively low exertion levels and low likelihood of injury. He typically plays golf croquet, a variation of the game that, according to the [United States Croquet Association](#), allows for continuous play. Its handicap system, he said, also lets participants of differing skill levels play together. The Sky Valley lawn features natural turf with irrigated greens that lie completely flat to meet United States Golf Association standards, Robinson said.



Credit: Contributed

Sky Valley Country Club member Lee Robinson, 74, on the club's croquet lawn. Robinson plays often and credits the game with helping him get his steps in and socialize.

“We can have a pretty major storm come through and drop an inch or two of rain,” he said, “And within 45 minutes, it’s perfectly dry, and you’re back out there playing again.”

Sky Valley Country Club croquet players match with other clubs on the plateau. It’s an area stretching from Sky Valley in the Northeast corner of Georgia east over the border through Cashiers, North Carolina, and on to Lake Toxaway.

“It can be very competitive ,” Robinson said. “Most people play at the enjoyable level, I’ll call it, where it might be the equivalent of a high-handicap golfer where they just are out to get a little exercise and enjoy themselves. But if you are interested in competition, it’s certainly available.”

Croquet from a health standpoint

Joash Lazarus is the community neurologist at Peachtree Hills Place, a retirement community in Buckhead where residents have access to a natural turf croquet lawn. He agrees that the game is an appropriate outlet for many seniors. Suitable quality and type of exercise vary among this population, depending on their health and fitness, he told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.



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Dr. Joash Lazarus, community neurologist at Peachtree Hills Place in Buckhead, says croquet can be helpful in sustaining seniors' cognitive functions and physical mobility.

“Croquet is a very good example of a type of exercise that can be incorporated into a whole lifestyle strategy,” he said. “It’s a very flexible form of exercise because it’s low impact on the joints.

“It targets several areas of mobility during the game ... There’s also something called dual tasking in which the movement itself — standing, walking, turning — is combined with a cognitive task, so, following and strategy. And dual tasking has been shown to have really great neurological benefits in these types of patients. And it’s very low risk — (there’s) a very low risk of injury.”

A commonly accepted fitness goal in the medical community for a healthy individual is 150 minutes a week of challenging exercise, Lazarus said, adding that croquet can help seniors meet that goal. Peachtree Hills Place residents may play as part of the community’s croquet club, and the community’s physical therapists also sometimes integrate the game into their patients’ regimens. Lazarus acknowledges that aspiring players might not be able to participate in the kind of structured opportunities Peachtree Hills Place facilitates, but he has a few pointers for those looking to play.



Credit: Contributed

Players at Peachtree Hills Place, a retirement community in Buckhead with a croquet lawn.

“A lot of them won’t have access to this type of really well-established program and community,” he said. “So, the key points would be, No. 1, consistency — even a little is

better than none ... If you have a rough week, getting back on the cycle is really important, and having some sort of guidance is good for injury prevention.”

Lazarus also acknowledged the plusses of congregating to play.

“It’s not a solo game,” he said. “Patients get out, form groups, and tend to socialize. And the mental health aspect of it is hard to quantify, but it’s very positive.”

Robinson can attest to the social benefits of the game. It’s afforded him quality time with his wife, Carol Robinson, 74. And the social events centered around croquet in Sky Valley allow players to mix — and attempt a little time travel.

“We have monthly parties at the pavilion, usually with a DJ and a band and dinner,” Lee Robinson said. “And everybody comes and plays croquet for a couple hours, and then, they have dinner, they dance and we all try to remember what it was like to be 18 years old.”

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About the Author

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